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## The Condensed Lam Rim

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

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We can spend some time in meditation as usual. Adopt a relaxed but upright physical posture. Besides being beneficial for meditation, sitting in an upright and composed posture can also inspire others. When they see you sitting upright they feel inspired to practise as well. This is beneficial for others.

### Importance of developing a positive motivation:

As we adopt the appropriate physical posture for meditation, it is also important we adopt the right state of mind as well. The reason why it is important to really pay attention to our state of mind, particularly with meditation, is because the main cause of all our problems comes down to the attitudes we have in our mind. So when we meditate, we try to adopt a clear and bright state of mind. Based on that, we try to develop a positive motivation and a good attitude for our practice.

The reason why we need to pay the utmost attention to the state of our mind and our attitudes is in accordance with the great master Lama Tsong Khapa. He said 'all good or bad karmas depend on the state of our mind'. When the mind has a kind and good attitude, then whatever we do will also become kind and good. But if we begin with a negative mental attitude, then whatever actions follow will also be negative. That is how everything is dependent upon the state of the mind. That is what Lama Tsong Khapa said.

Here we are talking about generating a positive attitude for a virtuous practice, such as a meditation practice. However, the importance of having positive attitudes should be understood beyond the practice sessions and be applied in our everyday lives, such as having discussions with others. If we can talk to people based upon a loving and kind attitude towards them, then the compassionate attitude that follows will be highly worthwhile and meaningful.

When a discussion is based upon mutual concern and respect for each other, then that communication will not become a cause for conflict and disturbances. In contrast to that, if we engage in a discussion with others based on a selfish attitude such as thinking, 'what can I gain from this for my own interest? What I can get out of this for my own profit?' then this kind of motivation leads to a lot of disruption and confusion in any discussion that follows. While some people acknowledge and accept that having a good attitude and motivation is important, there are those who still make comments that while we may begin our practice or any activity with a good motivation, they say it is very hard to maintain it. After a while it seems that things start going wrong again. I don't blame them

for those comments, because that is of course what does happen occasionally. We may find that this is also true for ourselves when, even though we have successfully developed a good motivation to begin with, after a while it starts to wane or we start to be influenced by negative attitudes again, and the mind gets disturbed again. If this does happen to us, then it is worthwhile for us to stop and think about why that happens. If we began with a good attitude, then why does it get disrupted half way through? What is causing that? It is worthwhile for us to investigate why this happens.

When we look into what could be causing the disruption and disturbance in our mind, we can see that there may be some sort of external condition that contributes to the disturbance in our mind. The external conditions could however be a very insignificant or small thing that causes us disturbance, causing us to either feel agitated with anger or experience other negative states of mind. While the external conditions may serve as the trigger for a strong negative attitude to develop within us - such as anger or attachment - the real conditions for a disturbed mind however lie within us. The disturbing attitudes or delusions within us are the real cause for the disturbances in our mind. We are so easily influenced by negative states of mind. Thus, it is difficult to develop a positive attitude. Even the slightest small condition can be an excuse for a negative state of mind to arise. So, we need to put a bit of effort, be conscientious and have some discipline, in developing the positive states of mind.

### Why the negative states of mind seem more prevalent:

The main reason why we are so easily influenced by negative states of mind, is because of the time and energy we have already spent in acquainting ourselves with our negative attitudes. It is because of our familiarity and our acquaintance with the negative states of mind that we so easily develop them. Whereas the reason it is difficult to develop and then maintain a positive state of mind is because of our lack of familiarity with the positive states of mind.

We come to the point in our internal investigation where we acknowledge and accept the fact that yes indeed we are more familiar with following the negative impulse and the negative attitudes in our mind. We seem to fuel these negative states more than the positive ones. We pay more attention to the negative states of our mind while not paying much attention to the positive states of mind. When we understand why it is so easy for our mind to be easily disturbed and easily agitated, then we come to a point of really beginning to acknowledge and accept this. We will begin to develop a very keen motivation and determination to acquaint ourselves with positive attitudes. But negative attitudes are already strong in our mind, and the positive state of mind is weak, so we need to put some effort into making the positive states of our mind stronger. And the only way to do this is to familiarise ourselves with positive attitudes. Even if it takes some effort, even if it takes some discipline, we must acquaint ourselves with positive attitudes because that is what is going to be the cause for us to have a more balanced and happy life.

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### **The method for developing the positive states of mind:**

We need to take on this responsibility and put our time and energy into this. But how do we begin to do this? What methods do we use to acquaint ourselves with a positive state of mind? What are the methods to reduce our negative states of mind? The answer in one simple word is: meditation. Meditation is a technique to acquaint ourselves with positive states of mind and lessen the negative ones. The great masters of the past have confirmed that the positive results that come from meditation include lessening of delusions and negative states of mind. Our mind becomes more subdued. If we meditate regularly, then we will find that our delusions have indeed lessened in strength and frequency. This is a clear sign that our meditation is having a positive effect. If we apply the proper technique and are consistent with it, then the mind becomes more subdued, calm and peaceful. This is in line with the meaning of meditation from the Tibetan word, which translates literally as 'familiarity'. And in this case the familiarity is with the positive states of mind. As we acquaint ourselves with virtue, and it becomes more familiar to us, the mind will naturally be in a virtuous and positive state. The negativity within our mind will lessen.

### **The benefits of meditation:**

Another clear sign of meditation taking effect is that our faith in the Dharma, the teachings of the Buddha, naturally increases. Our mind becomes clearer, and we have a natural tendency of wanting to engage in virtue. This is a positive sign that the meditation is effective. When we consider this, then it dawns upon us that meditation is indeed the most important thing in our life. We begin to see the value of meditating because of our internal investigations on how the delusions arise and indentifying the positive ones. We come to realise that meditation serves as a means to overcome the negative states of mind and increase the positive states of mind. This realisation spurs us into practising meditation. At least it will be clear to us that if we engage in the practice of meditation, then it will definitely benefit us. Now whether we adopt the meditation in our daily lives or not is another matter. In order for us to take it seriously, we need to have a clear understanding that meditation is definitely the means to develop a clear and positive state of mind. As we look inwardly and honestly investigate, we come to that positive conclusion. Meditation is therefore a technique of forming good habits in our lives.

### **The fault of criticising others:**

It is much easier to see misbehaviour in others. There are some parents who often relate their children's behaviours as being a bad habit. But I try to remind the parents that a child of that young age will have a lot of time ahead of them to become acquainted with bad and good habits. At that age, the child is reflecting the parents' bad habits. Look into our own habits first, rather than blaming others and immediately accusing them of having bad habits. There are times when children can take examples of the good habits from their parents' lives. Parents can look into their own habits and try to correct them. This will influence children into adopting good habits.

Some people have the bad habit of immediately criticising or accusing others for having bad habits, for misdeeds or misbehaviours and so forth. In relation to emotions, we might immediately accuse others of being short-tempered, for example. In relation to being short tempered, I can relate to that on a very frank basis - I have friends and associates who have made comments to me over and over again about how their partner is short-tempered. They seem to get easily irritated all the time and seem to be always upset and angry about things. After hearing this for quite a while, I say 'well, how about you, have you considered whether you get angry and easily upset yourself? Maybe it is worthwhile looking at yourself and checking yourself before making assumptions and criticising your partner'. This is something we need to do before we readily and immediately criticise others; it is much more worthwhile looking into ourselves. If we do find that we have a problem with anger or any other disturbances, then we can be a little bit more tolerant and understanding with others' situations. We can relate to others in a more effective way, rather than just criticising them.

If we have the tendency to criticise others, then that comes from not seeing our own short temperedness or anger as being a fault, and from seeing others as clearly and obviously being short-tempered or having anger episodes. This way of seeing things is definitely a fault. But we either do not acknowledge this or we don't see it as being a fault. This is where our critical state of mind or judgement comes from. There is Tibetan saying, 'even when we ourselves have a fault that is as big as a yak we won't see it, but if others have faults even as small as and insignificant as a louse we will be able to see them very clearly'.

Recapping the main points presented earlier, we need to truly acknowledge and accept that our negative states of mind and negative attitudes are the main cause of all our problems, frustrations, and disturbances in our mind. Likewise, our positive attitudes are the cause for a happier more peaceful state of mind. We need to familiarise ourselves with a positive state of mind in order to behave well, as well as reduce our negative states of mind. We do this by practising meditation.

### **The meditation technique:**

We can now spend sometime in meditation. Adopt the appropriate physical posture; the main point is to sit upright with the spine straight. Generate a positive state of mind. There are different levels of positive states of mind, however the most appropriate here is the supreme positive state of mind, which sets the motivation that 'the practice that I am about to do now is not for my own personal sake, but as a way to benefit others'. In order to be of service and to benefit others, there's no choice but to overcome the negative states of mind within ourselves. We have to subdue our own mind in order to effectively help others. With that understanding, we set the motivation of doing the meditation practise as a means to subdue our own mind so that ultimately we can benefit others by giving our utmost service to them. This is the most positive state of mind that we can develop.

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To recap, the meditation technique that we are adopting here, first we need to withdraw our mind from all thoughts. Temporarily, we remove our thoughts from all concerns, be they good or bad. We temporarily switch off from all preoccupations in our mind, from all past memories or future preoccupations, and internalise our focus. Withdrawing our mind from all other thoughts and distractions, we bring our focus inward, and as we bring our mind inward, the mind begins to settle down.

As it is difficult to maintain that settling, we need to anchor the mind by focusing on an object. The object that we choose to focus on here is our own breath, on the natural inhalation and exhalation. Imagine seeing the breath coming in and going out naturally. Just maintain the focus on that. Attempting to do that sincerely and with a disciplined mind, we begin to notice the positive effect immediately, where our mind naturally subsides into a tranquil state. This is because we have intentionally withdrawn our mind from all preoccupations, including all disturbances, all forms of delusions, anger and jealousies. We completely feel free from that.

Of course there is a long term benefit in meditation that we gradually experience as we become more familiar with the practice. However we can immediately begin to feel a positive effect as well. While we are withdrawing and keeping our mind focussed on the breath, we are intentionally avoiding negative states of mind. This means we are lessening our familiarity with them. The less we acquaint ourselves with the negative states of mind and allow our mind to be influenced by delusions, the more we benefit and gain virtue for ourselves. This is the beginning of how to train the mind. For the next few minutes we bring our full attention and focus on our breath. (*Pause for meditation*).

It is advised to slowly come out of a meditative state. If we relate meditation to being beneficial, then we can take it to heart and make a commitment to try to do some regular meditation, and to integrate that into our daily lives. And not use the excuse of being too busy to meditate. We often find the slightest excuse: 'I can't do my meditation because I'm too busy'. However, there are many other inappropriate things that we engage in our lives which we don't seem to leave aside no matter how busy we are. We never give an excuse of being busy to do certain things in our lives which are destructive and are not beneficial for us. But for something that is beneficial and is obviously worthwhile, we seem to find the excuse of being busy and we do not attempt to meditate. This is really a pity, and we would be ashamed. We are depriving ourselves of a most worthwhile activity, something which is most beneficial in our lives; it will enrich and give meaning to our lives. Meditation is something that doesn't take much time; we did it here in a few minutes. If we were to adopt meditation and try to really take it seriously and try to make a good habit of meditation in our daily lives, then it would gradually bring more and more calmness, and more and more stability within our lives. We need to acquaint ourselves with that positive discipline of meditation in our daily lives.

As to the practical benefits of meditation, we don't have to resort to theory; we can look to our own experience. Based on our experience, even the meagre attempt we make with meditation actually brings some solace, calm and peace within ourselves. Based on our own personal experience, this should be the reason for us to take meditation to heart and try to really implement the practice in our life. There is no question that meditation results in a happier, more peaceful mind. I don't have to be emphasising this point so much, as I hear it from many of you. There are many who have confided in me that having adopted the practice of meditation brings happiness to their mind. The times when they missed a meditation session were the times when their mind started getting disturbed and more agitated. This is something people have verified from their own experience. So I am just reminding you of something that you already know is beneficial in your life. I'm trying to encourage you to take it to heart and to take it more seriously, and to implement it into your daily life.

Not only do you benefit from meditating, but even your partner or companion seems to benefit from your meditation. Even though they may not adopt meditation into their lives, they seem to notice the results of their partner's meditation, and they become calmer and more subdued. Your meditation seems to have a positive effect on them too. People who meditate appreciate the benefits, so why don't others who are eager and want to adopt it into their lives take it more seriously as well?

If we say that we are going to meditate and we don't actually implement that practice, then we haven't taken it seriously. If that is the case then it is questionable whether there is any positive effect or not. But for those who have taken it seriously, taken it to heart and tried to meditate on a regular basis, then they will experience the benefits. The partners or companions may also be encouraged to adopt a meditation practice.

#### **Conclusion:**

Sometimes it is more meaningful to have a short teaching session. If even a few points have been related and understood clearly, then it serves the purpose. Having a long discussion, where a lot of topics have been taught but maybe not so many points have been understood or related to ourselves, that could be a waste of time. Spending the time and energy to understand a long teaching may tire listeners as well as the teacher. So keep it short and sweet, as they say, by taking to heart a few good points. If those points get across, then that serves the purpose and is worthwhile.

Before we conclude for the evening, it would be good to again spend few moments meditating. Adopt an appropriate posture and bring our mind into focus, withdrawing our mind from distractions. This time we focus on the sound of the Buddha Shakyamuni mantra.

*TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA*

*Transcribed from tape by Kim Foon Looi  
Edit 1 by Cynthia Karena  
Edit 2 by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe  
Edited Version*

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